

VZCZCXRO1608  
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA  
DE RUEHUJA #2356 3121507  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 081507Z NOV 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1405  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 8240  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS ABUJA 002356

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA  
ENERGY FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH NORTHERN NIGERIAN INTERFAITH "BRIDGE BUILDERS"

¶1. SUMMARY: PolOffs and a visiting DRL/IRF PMF participated in an "Interactive Session with Interfaith and Faith Based NGOs in Kaduna State," sponsored by the Bridge Builders Association of Nigeria, a group of Christian bishops, Muslim clerics and activists which promotes interfaith dialogue and ethnic harmony. The consensus of participants was that a combination of political and economic factors, more than religion, provoked communal violence in the north, and that USG participation in interfaith dialogue was welcomed. While many interlocutors expressed a general disillusionment with US foreign policy, community leaders expressed a desire for USG help in building local capacity to address unemployment, poverty, health and governance issues, which are shared across faiths and ethnic groups. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Despite media portrayals of the U.S. as anti-Muslim and suspicion of US motivations, most of the approximately 80 representatives from about 20 NGOs who attended the Bridge Builders event welcomed USG participation in interfaith dialogue and saw it as a positive force for promoting peace, stability and development in northern Nigeria. The groups agreed that a sustained and regular dialogue between USG and communities in the north is needed. They identified many sources of religious conflict, including youth unemployment, media agitation, poor governance that left social ills unaddressed, and incitement by political and economic elites for their own benefit. Many participants urged the USG to engage with grassroots NGOs rather than just high level officials.

¶3. Some attendees expressed admiration for the USG, in particular its promotion of women into positions of public trust, and of America as a multi-cultural society. One female participant noted that although women are the primary victims of conflict, they are never part of peace talks; another suggested that if women had more influence, there would be less conflict in Northern Nigeria. PolOff's observation that our incoming Ambassador, and current DCM, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and Secretary of State were all women brought sustained applause from the women in the meeting.

¶4. A former Nigerian diplomat described the need for serious efforts to counter the "misinformation, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of events" that spread conflict along religious lines and called into question U.S. principles and motives. PolOff noted that several American interventions in

recent years have been to better the lives of Muslims around the world i.e. Bosnia, Kosovo, tsunami relief, and a less positive experience in Somalia. PolOff acknowledged that the USG has not been as successful as it would like in getting its message to, and in having a meaningful dialogue with, communities like theirs in northern Nigeria, but that we were making efforts to change that.

15. COMMENT: The dialogue at the forum was frank, animated, and respectful, and seemed much appreciated and well received by all. The heavy turnout for the event indicated a strong desire on the part of civil society in the North to engage with the USG. Post intends to continue this dialogue, and will include USAID and PAS staff on future visits. END COMMENT.  
PIASCIK